

## VIEQUES WHITE PAPER EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

In 1983, the Department of the Navy and the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico entered into a Memorandum Of Understanding ("MOU") concerning environmental issues and economic development issues arising out of Navy and Marine Corps activities on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, where the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF) is located. Vieques is located about seven miles southeast of the main island of Puerto Rico. The island is about 20 miles long and 4 miles wide at its widest point. The Department of the Navy currently owns about two-thirds of the island's 33,000 acres, which it acquired between 1941 and 1950, by purchasing property from private landowners at fair market value.

### Environmental Stewardship

The Navy has been a good steward of the land and water entrusted to its care at Vieques. Navy has protected and nurtured the wildlife, forests, plants, and resources as it has carried out its mission. Its use of a very small part of the island for a live impact area has not harmed the health of its neighbors on Vieques or the environment in which they live. Navy is working hard to comply with the existing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit and, working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to ensure that a renewed permit reflects the best science available. Through careful management, the Navy has nurtured the environment of this pristine island and will continue to work in partnership with representatives of Puerto Rico and Vieques to preserve this unique paradise.

- The Navy is committed to protecting the health and safety of all residents of Vieques. To date, the Navy has seen no credible evidence that its activities pose a risk to human health. Preliminary studies recently conducted by the Navy indicate there has been no migration of explosives-related substances from the range to the civilian community on Vieques. Navy is conducting further studies and cooperating with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) on its independent health risk assessment.

- Overall, the Navy's environmental record on Vieques has been excellent. In testimony before the U.S. Congress in 1994, the Mayor of Vieques stated "In relation to environmental matters, the Navy has done a magnificent job. Their constant preoccupation with protecting the turtles and brown pelicans, endangered species, has been meritorious and worthy of commendation."
- About half of the 22,000 acres owned by the DON is included in seven ecological conservation zones, which preserve the island's rare flora and fauna. Navy conducts active management programs to protect several threatened and endangered species.
  - Sea turtle management program protects turtle nesting sites and has successfully hatched and released back into the wild 21,000 hawksbill and leatherback turtles.
  - Brown pelicans appear to be thriving at a DON-protected nesting site.
  - DON management of a controlled sea-grass conservation zone has created one of the safest havens for manatees in the Caribbean.
- Navy has carefully preserved Vieques' historical and archeological heritage by comprehensively surveying and documenting the island's cultural resources, protecting them from disturbance, entering many of them into the National Register of Historic Places, and funding projects to restore unique architectural structures.
- DON bombing activity is limited to an isolated area of about 900 acres, less than three percent of the island's landmass, and more than eight miles distance to the nearest population.

#### Economic Development Efforts

Under the provisions of the 1983 MOU, The Department of the Navy agreed to work with Government of Puerto Rico agencies and groups to seek funds and financial assistance from other Federal agencies to encourage economic development on Vieques and to make every meaningful effort within its power to obtain full employment on the island. The Navy has diligently sought to fulfill these undertakings and achieve the goals of the MOU to improve the quality of life for those who live on Vieques.

- Since the early 1980's, the Department of the Navy and the Department of Defense have sought to diversify Vieques' economy by bringing a broad range of manufacturing and assembly businesses and agricultural activities to the island and by supporting its growing tourist industry.
  - Navy and DOD helped create more than 400 jobs in electronics, textile, and jewelry manufacturing and assembly.
  - Navy leased thousands of acres of Navy property at no cost to Viequenses and funded capital improvements for cattle and hay production and agriculture businesses.
  - Navy supported the growing tourism industry by conveying land for expansion of the airport runway; permitting cruise vessels to dock at Navy's pier; building recreational and ecotourism facilities; and by opening beaches and conservation zones to the public and maintaining them in a pristine, attractive condition.
- Navy arranged Federal grants to Puerto Rico agencies to operate a professionally staffed economic development office and provide business startup assistance in Vieques for many years.
- Navy commands on Puerto Rico have directly and indirectly supported scores of programs and projects for Vieques in the past two decades and continue to engage in a variety of activities including property leases, permits, development planning and other efforts to promote economic activity on the island.
- Vieques is physically and economically isolated from and dependent upon, the main island of Puerto Rico. The high costs and inconvenience of transportation and communications hamper economic activity and growth.
- Despite the isolation and dependency, Vieques has a relatively low unemployment rate compared with the rest of Puerto Rico and a growing tourism industry, as evidenced by the development of major resort hotels that will add hundreds of jobs to the island's economy.

The Navy and the Federal Government have dedicated substantial resources to the economic development of Vieques.

It is a challenging place to do business, and the Federal Government alone cannot bring economic progress to the island. There are significant opportunities for further development on Vieques, but any such effort must be a cooperative venture among the Government of Puerto Rico, the Vieques Municipality, business investors, and the Navy. In this partnership, the Navy can and will assist in the future economic development of Vieques.